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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/ERA, EUR/UBI, PM/RSAT, PM/PMAT, AND NEA-I

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SUBJECT: DUTCH PUT UN PROTECTION FORCE ON PSC AGENDA

REF: STATE 180598

Classified By: ANDREW SCHOFER, POLCOUNS, FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

1. (S) On August 23, POLCOUNS discussed reftel points with Dutch MFA officials Bahia Tahzib (Deputy European Correspondent) and Adri van Loopik (Head of the Gulf States Division in the Department of North Africa and Middle East Affairs). (Note: POLOFFS had previously discussed the issue with Tahzib and her boss, European Correspondent Joep Wijnands, on August 19). Tahzib and van Loopik told POLCOUNS that the issue had been placed by the Dutch on the agenda of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) meeting scheduled for August 24. Reftel points, they said, would be taken into account in preparing the Dutch position for the meeting. The Dutch, as president, had also circulated a copy of UNSYG Annan's letter requesting support for UN operations in Iraq to members in preparation for the meeting (sent via e-mail to EUR/UBI, EUR/ERA, and USEU).

2. (S) Tahzib and van Loopik noted that raising the issue in the PSC before considering it at the working group level (COMEM) was a break from normal practice, which was warranted by the importance of the issue and the need to take a timely decision. Tahzib stressed that the Dutch wanted the issue discussed before the EU "exploratory mission" (headed by MFA Deputy Political Director Hermann Schaaper) departed for Iraq at the end of the month. The issue could then be taken up by the Gymnich on September 3-4, the COMEM meeting scheduled for September 6 or 7, and, if necessary, the GAERC on September 13-14.

3. (S) Tahzib and van Loopik stressed that discussion at the PSC would be exploratory in nature. As president, the Dutch saw their role at this stage as "testing the water" to see whether the EU could take a coordinated position. Some states, they said, had earlier expressed confusion about the request -- particularly with regard to the amount required -- and in some cases irritation at the manner in which individual states (but not others) had been approached. They did not expect these concerns to create serious problems at the PSC or subsequent discussions, however. Tahzib and van Loopik noted that all EU members were on record supporting a strengthened UN role in Iraq and on the need to ensure that any UN presence there was adequately protected.

4. (S) Van Loopik observed that even if consensus emerged among EU members to support the UN protection force, the money would still need to be wrestled out of the Commission; the Dutch, as president, would be prepared to "do battle with the Commission" on this if necessary. Another option, he suggested, would be for individual states to make separate contributions. Tahzib and van Loopik emphasized that discussion of the issue was still at a very early stage within the EU and urged patience. At POLCOUNS request, they promised to provide feedback from the PSC meeting and to coordinate closely on the issue.

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